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## THE INFLUENCE OF THE WAR UPON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THOUGHT OF GREAT BRITAIN

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The subject on which I have been asked to write for the readers of the *Journal* is one which no individual can hope to treat with anything like adequacy. The channels of religious life in Great Britain are too ramified and numerous to allow of a single observer doing any sort of justice to the amount or the taste of the waters which are flowing along them during these flooded days. You can form impressions, either from personal observation or from such utterances as are available. But the latter are not always representative or characteristic, and even when they are, the impression which they make is likely to be subjective. This consideration applies, no doubt, to any estimate of religious life and thought, even in the piping days of peace; the data of church life are not to be picked up casually from statistics or from literature, and an outsider will be almost certain to misjudge the situation, unless he is in touch with the inner spirit, which rarely can be caught without prolonged intercourse. Yet war-time increases the difficulty. The tension under which the community is living affects the faculty of judgment in nearly all departments; the religious effect of the war cannot be gauged at the time being with anything like accuracy, owing to the transitional character of the period; and appreciations

of the situation, ecclesiastically considered, tend to be unreliable in proportion as they are clear-cut. Even when one feels that changes are afoot, it is a delicate matter to define their extent and significance.

For these and other reasons one would prefer to wait until the war is over before attempting to form any judgment upon the influence which the present upheaval is likely to produce in the religious world. One would require to stand farther away from it than is possible at the moment. But, on the understanding that anything one writes is to be read as provisional and tentative, one may venture to set down a few impressions received during the past twenty months. These, I should premise, are based mainly on English and Scottish evidence. What the Irish situation is I only know from hearsay. Still, there is a certain homogeneity in the situation. Christianity is Christianity after all, and one effect of a war situation is to bring out the common realities underneath the ecclesiastical divergences of interpretation. If a nation under war does not lay aside its besetting sins, it is at least obliged to lay aside every weight, and in the sphere of religion the weight of sectarianism is rapidly thrown away by those who are setting themselves to face the sharp demands of the crisis. The situation is thus more of a unity than in normal days. It is, upon the whole, less likely that the sympathetic observer will go wrong in his effort to detect the common features and the characteristic phenomena of the age.

I shall begin frankly by expressing my opinion that the influence of the war upon the religious situation is not nearly so powerful as an outsider might expect. I would even go farther and predict that it is not likely to leave any far-reaching changes behind it. Political students predict revolutions in at least two of the countries engaged in the present conflict, no matter how it ends, but very few competent observers of the religious or the theological situation would be prepared to make a similar forecast. So far as the present day is concerned, in the matter of religious life throughout Great Britain, the words of the author of Daniel have been fulfilled: "Many shall be purified and made white and refined [i.e., by their sufferings]; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of

the wicked shall understand [i.e., grasp the religious significance of the time, and act accordingly], but the wise shall understand." The war does not make more people good. It makes good people better; makes them pray more and tighten their hold upon the things unseen. But it intensifies the frivolity and selfishness of others, as it has always done. This war is not proving any magical panacea for unbelief and worldliness in Great Britain any more than in the other areas of the war zone. Those who looked for broad, public evidence of a religious revival are disappointed—as it was well that they should be. Attendance at the churches has in few cases increased to any extent. It has not fallen off, indeed, and the intercession services are probably as well frequented as ever. But there is no outward sign of any thronging to the churches on the part of those who formerly were loosely attached or wholly unattached. This is not altogether to be regretted. There might be a return to the Lord of Hosts rather than to the Lord, an exploiting of Christianity in the interests of patriotism of the lower order, which would really spell weakness instead of strength. Without being complacent, I think we may congratulate ourselves that there has not been any movement in this direction throughout Great Britain. We have not sung hymns of hate. The responsible leaders of religious thought have steadily avoided the temptation to make church-going a fetish. In war, as in peace, the churches may be filled by people who attend from more motives than those of pure worship. So far as I have been able to find out, these meretricious inducements and attractions have been eschewed; no hectic or convulsive means have been adopted to crowd church buildings. A stranger might look for exceptionally large audiences in church, and might draw unfavorable conclusions from their absence. But this would be a hasty inference. I think we must honestly confess that the daily intercession services are not so well attended as they ought to be, and that a phenomenon like this is ominous; only genuinely religious people can be expected to go to such services, and they do not go in anything like the numbers which the rolls of local church membership would justify us in expecting. On the other hand, the church services are carried on with much the same intensity and care as before. If they are

outwardly as quiet as usual, for the most part, this is a proof that the war has not produced, as it easily might have done, an excited; sensational type of religion, which would be as demoralizing as some of the revivals engineered by professional evangelists during times of peace.

Religious life, however, is not to be gauged by attendance at churches, although that is one expression of a nation's faith. When Felix persuaded Paul to speak of faith in Christ Jesus, the apostle "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come," and the influence of spiritual Christianity can be felt in the national attitude toward moral issues. In the matter of temperance, in the stricter sense of the term, Great Britain has shown herself, under the lead of the king and of some prominent newspapers like the *London Spectator*, more alive than her government to the seriousness of the situation. This has been one of the really satisfactory effects of the war—the awakening of conscience on the part of many more than temperance fanatics to the inimical tendencies of the liquor traffic. The churches have naturally thrown themselves into the struggle with ardor, and although reform has been blocked for the time being by the politicians, a step has been taken in the education of the public mind which will never be retraced.

But, turning to the religious situation in its specific character, I should say that the pressure of the war has deepened three convictions. There are three Christian truths which appeal now-a-days with particular force to congregations: prayer, the atonement, and immortality.

In the main, it has been a healthy interest in prayer; that is, not in prayer as a superstitious means of inducing the divine favor, or as an involuntary cry wrung from panic, but in prayer as the expression of moral submission and humility. One of the most adequate utterances on this point came early in the war from an English admiral, and as few words have been more deeply appreciated than Sir David Beatty's, I venture to quote a sentence or two from his famous message, bearing on this very topic.

Surely [he wrote] the Almighty God does not intend this war to be just a hideous fracas, a bloody, drunken orgy. There must be purpose in it all;

improvement must be born out of it all. In what direction, France has already shown us the way. She has risen out of her ruined cities with her revived religion, which is most wonderful. Russia has been welded into a whole and religion plays a greater part. England still remains to be taken out of the stupor of self-satisfaction and complacency in which her great and flourishing condition has steeped her, and until she can be stirred out of this condition and until religious revival takes place at home, just so long will the war continue. When she can look out on the future with humbler eyes and a prayer on her lips, then we can begin to count the days toward the end.

Since these words were addressed to the nation, the stirring has commenced. People are praying and praying together quietly; the value of intercessory prayer has been learned by many afresh, and in this way there has been a distinct impetus to the practice of the Christian life.

As was to be expected, perhaps, the problem of prayers for the dead has been raised in an intensely practical form. The Shorter Catechism of the Scottish churches declares that "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory." But what of those who are not "believers," in the full sense of the term? Many die in battle who are not saints. Are their loved ones on earth to cease praying for their well-being? In many of the Reformed churches, the reaction against the mediaeval doctrine of purgatory swept men into a repudiation even of those simple naïve prayers for the departed, which since the second century had formed part of the spontaneous piety of the Catholic church. It has been interesting to notice how the stress of war conditions has modified this repudiation. Thus, a representative of the evangelical section in the Church of England, like Bishop Moule, has publicly expressed his sympathy with the impulse to include the departed in prayer. It is too soon yet to say whether this marks a change in the theology of prayer, but it is significant that the issue has been raised.

The atonement has been prominent in the thoughts of people, under the light of sacrifice. The war has shown that there are some things that can only be done by blood, not by pious talk. Chaplains from the front often report that the men fall back with ardor on the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. And the people at home see in the self-sacrifice of the soldier and the sailor what these

men would be the last to see or claim for themselves—an illustration of the Love which lays down its life for others. “Jesus, lover of my soul” is one of the favorite hymns of the troops at the battle line, not simply on account of its tune, but for its message; and one of the few religious and effective members of the present cabinet told a friend of mine that he was living day by day in the thought of Christ as our Sanctuary.

Even more vital has been the stress laid on immortality. Thousands of people have acquired an entirely new interest in the next world. It has developed superstitious forms and ministered to spiritualism in certain quarters, but apart from this, the Christian interest has been vivified, and few subjects are preached about which command closer attention.

Contra vim mortis  
Non est medicamen in hortis.

Men and women in these days are finding that a number of religious gardens do not grow any satisfactory herb for the fear of death. Wise and Christian books on immortality are having a steady circulation. It is not possible to mistake the increasing desire for a gospel which has some definite message upon the life after death, although the theological result cannot yet be foreseen. And yet here as elsewhere the theological interpretation will count. Newman once said that “religion is never in greater danger than when in consequence of national or international troubles the schools of theology have broken up or ceased to be.” The theology or religious thought of Great Britain is active; it is giving, as it should, a lead, as, for example, through the utterances of the Bishop of Oxford. But the material on which it works is hardly ready yet for any fresh reconstruction. Such a reconstruction is more than likely to come, but at present it is barely possible to do more than feel some of the impulses and unconscious tendencies, of which I have mentioned three. In the long run, the effect of the war will probably amount in the main to an alteration of emphasis, so far as one can judge from the facts of the situation under one’s eyes.

It would not be accurate, however, to omit one effect of the war upon the religious situation, especially as it will not occur readily

to Americans. I mean the new estimate of the state in relation to the life of Christians as organized in communities of worship. The problem of church and state in Great Britain was threatening to become stale. It had reached the stage when some fresh treatment was necessary. That treatment, even before the war, had begun to be applied, but it was being applied by scholars who detected that a closer analysis of the meaning of the state, in the light of mediaeval theories, was necessary. The war has supplied an impulse on the practical side, which will have a much wider effect than many people seem to realize. This applies in particular to the churches which stand outside any state connection. Among them there was often a curious tendency to regard the state, to all intents and purposes, as indifferent if not antagonistic to the divine purpose; political service was viewed as a sphere into which individual members might venture, at their own risk and for their own ends, but such churches as churches rarely undertook any responsibility for the state, and seldom prayed even for the king and the commonwealth. This provincial attitude has been undermined. The so-called "free" churches have exhibited a fine patriotism, and this has not been simply on the part of individuals. These communities have been brought sharply into touch with the national requirements and the national interests. They have had their eyes opened to the function of the state as a moral as well as a material entity, and their conscience has been roused to a perception of the truth that no one, not even a church, can live to itself. On this line I anticipate an alteration in several directions. He would be a sanguine prophet who would forecast any immediate co-operation between the Church of England and the Nonconformist churches in that country. It is in the last degree unlikely that such a result will be hastened by the present war, even over the Kikuyu mission problem. But the Scottish situation is very different, and the union of the two great Presbyterian churches of that country, which before the war was afoot, is almost certain to be accelerated.

As a cognate phenomenon, we ought to note the movement for co-operation between the Nonconforming churches in England, which Mr. J. H. Shakespeare of the Baptist Union has been promoting. It is not accidental that this movement has taken shape



during the war. Men are looking forward already to the new situation which the cessation of war will create, and attempting to set their ecclesiastical houses in order for the new demands. If anything is certain, it is certain that men will come back from the line of battle with an impatience of little, petty divisions between the churches at home, with a contempt for the friction and the waste involved in some of the traditional subdivisions of ecclesiastical Christianity, and with a demand that the central things shall control everything. Already this spirit is being felt. If it leads to a United Free Church in England, the gain will be broad and deep. But whatever comes of the project in the way of organization, it springs from a quickened vision of the gospel as "no longer obscured by a false emphasis on secondary matters, but one which is worth living for, worth dying for."

The Church of England herself has undertaken a national mission, this autumn, which ought to be of powerful service to the life of the people. It is being organized with a careful attention to the spiritual needs of the day, and the unrivaled opportunities at the disposal of the authorities offer a chance of rousing the Christian conscience which all without as well as within that church may well hope will be seized. The moral leadership of the nation has been almost entirely left to the churches during this war, and it has not been left in vain. Several journals have spoken to the hearts of the people, and among the non-religious ones it is right to mention the *Times Literary Supplement*, whose leading articles have been couched in a high tone. There have been books of searching value issued by laymen as well as by clergymen. But the spoken word has almost invariably come from the pulpit. So far as the Church of England is concerned, it will come with power during the national mission. Anyone, for example, who listened to the address delivered by the Bishop of Oxford in his cathedral on the first anniversary of the outbreak of the war will rejoice to think that so intense and Christian a spirit is able to move the heart and conscience of the nation.

The need of such a mission of faith and repentance will not be questioned by any thoughtful observer of the times. The church has been called upon to render two supreme services to the country.

In the first place, to rally the spirit of vital self-sacrifice, which counts nothing too costly to spare for the cause of freedom and justice. This service has been rendered amply. The church has interpreted the need of military service to an unmilitary people, who were naturally shy at first of undertaking European responsibilities; she has done this without slipping into the easy ruts of militarism. The real obstacle to Christianity has been the caricature of it by a few pacifists, but the moral sense of the community quickly saw through these parasites, and they have been left to the pity and contempt of their fellows. On a broad scale, the churches have been able to concentrate their attention upon the need of maintaining the steadfast spirit of endurance among the people, of preventing silly outbursts of hatred, and of interpreting the duties of sacrifice, unity, and economy. The tone of church services even in time of peace is prone to suggest a lowering of vitality; Christianity is often presented in such a way as to make the hearer wonder if it can have any vital relation to the responsibilities of the age. The war has cleansed worship of that weak, amiable spirit. The churches may be said to have risen to the occasion, and fostered the temper of free and willing response to the state's call.

But the second duty of the church in a time of war is to keep an edge on the spiritual and moral forces which enter so powerfully into the efficiency of a nation. This has been done as it could not be done during the South African war, when the wisdom, to say nothing of the justice, of the conflict was doubted by wide circles in the country. Today, the development of events has made it more clear than ever that the war is for larger interests than those of the empire, and the conscience of the church is free from dubiety upon the issues. Such an absence of hesitation has contributed to the enforcing of repentance for national and individual sins. It is felt, and rightly felt, to be imperative that this searching of conscience should take place before the hour of victory. Many of our best people, in the Christian sense, have no doubts about the need of a crushing triumph in the interests of civilization. But they wonder whether they deserve it. They are asking themselves if anything in their own lives is hindering the triumph of God in

this war, if they are fit to be entrusted with victory, and if they are worthy to ask for it from his hands. These thoughts are abroad throughout the land, not in newspapers, but in the hearts of the true patriots. They are wholesome and fruitful. As the two archbishops of the English church put it in one of their pastoral letters:

We have in days of quiet made too little of the claim of God upon our lives. Can we wonder that in stern hours like this it is hard to kindle afresh the deep and simple thoughts which we have allowed to grow languid and uncertain? But such rekindling there must be. Give earnest heed to this most sacred of duties. Set yourselves, even in the midst of the exigencies and passions of war, to be loyal to the spirit of Jesus. Strive to keep openness of mind and soul for such message as the Holy Spirit may reveal to us at an hour when God is judging what is base and inspiring what is best in England's life. He may speak in the ordered ministry of word and sacrament, or in the roar of battle, or in the silence of a shadowed home. He does, for we have all seen it, give, to those who lie open to his gift, courage and understanding and patience and high hope.

These words reflect a widespread attitude throughout the churches. The humbling of soul before God is organic to the vital impulses of a religious patriotism, and it is the opportunity of the churches in this hour to bring out this intimate relation. Many of those who love Great Britain best are looking for the good gift of a national quickening along such lines. No one can say whether the end of the war will produce an atmosphere in which the social and political problems will be more easily handled. It is unlikely that it will do as much in this direction as some ardent spirits think. But religious people feel that here and now they ought to be doing something to prepare themselves for the closing stages of the conflict; not simply to pray for the success of their cause next year, but to pray for such a temper in the nation as will enable it to meet the fortunes of war and the final settlement with moral steadiness and a deepened sense of responsibility to God.

Feelings like this, which are surging through the core of the nation, stir a number of allied problems in religion. The war has set people thinking, often in a confused way, about ultimate problems like the justice of God, human suffering, the relation of Christ to national life, and organized Christianity. There is the ordinary cry about the bankruptcy of Christianity, a cry which, I am bound

to confess, seems to me to come as a rule from men who never impressed anybody with having put much capital into the business of Christianity before the war. More honest, I think, is the doubt whether war and national interests can be connected at all with the teaching of Jesus; and this has given a good opportunity for pointing out that Christianity is not the reproduction of rules and regulations for a sect without political responsibility in the first century, and that it has had a history in which God has been living and teaching. I have been struck with the comparative lack of an exaggerated emphasis upon the Old Testament. One almost expected that such a stress would be laid on the Old Testament, for the New Testament is, in the nature of the case, defective in national outlook, and men instinctively turn to the prophets and the history of Israel, with a passionate thirst for words corresponding to their day and danger. I do not think this tendency has been nearly so marked as it was, if I can judge from history, during the Indian mutiny or the Crimean war. Probably the more wholesome use of the Old Testament during this war, in our country, has been due to the work done by the historical criticism of the past twenty years. It is only in the little circles of the cranks and pacifists that the Marcionite heresy has re-emerged, and its emergence is so trivial that it only serves to throw into relief the general sanity of attitude on the part of the large majority.

When Walt Whitman finished his notes on the American Civil War, he said that the real war, with its seething hell and black, infernal background, would never get into the books. Neither will the bright religious spirit which shines through the shadows get into print; at least, only a few rays of it will. It would require an article by itself to estimate the religious literature thrown up by this war in English, some of it remarkable, especially in prose. Yet even the spontaneous expressions of feeling from men in the trenches, who fight, hating war and doing military duty as a strange work of God, even these would not convey more than a section of the religious reflections and reactions produced by the war in this country. The influential and fundamental effects are not to be tabulated, at any rate not yet. And, as I said at the beginning of this article, it seems to me doubtful if these effects will be found in

the long run to be very far-reaching. Like any supreme crisis, the war has accentuated both good and evil in the national life, and the religious world shares this influence. In the religion of Great Britain during the war period we have had our surprises; they have been surprises of deterioration as well as of rallying. But if one or two have failed here and there under the test, if occasionally indifference and selfishness have cloaked themselves under the robe of conscience, if there has been a lack of nerve and fiber—due in part to sectarian ideas of Christianity and a sentimental misconception of the gospel—on the other hand it would be affectation to deny that the large majority of those who count and will count after this in the Christian service have been true to the call of the hour. That is why, when one regards this war as a test, it is possible to admit, without undue regret, that it cannot be said to have exerted any marked effect in the religious life and thought of the country. A chemical test does not increase the material already present. It simply reveals the genuine and the false. In many quarters a purifying influence can be traced, in the shape of a larger simplicity of faith, an ampler generosity, a readiness to see good in other communions, a broadening of the ecclesiastical sympathies, and a sincere spirit of self-sacrifice. Undoubtedly, thousands have been touched to finer issues, not only in their personal religion, but in their mental interests, which have become less insular and parochial. An impartial critic, I think, would admit all this. He would also agree, I hope, that one of the most reassuring features of the situation, from the standpoint of religion, is that we have managed to avoid the spirit of hatred, as we did not during the Napoleonic war, when the hatred of Napoleon replaced the love of God for many. I am not prepared to say why or how this ugly feature has been kept out of the picture. It has not been because we were winning, for our military record as yet has been an almost unrelieved record of humiliation and defeat. It has not been because we have had no provocation, for the high reputation of the Turks and to a less degree of the Austrians as clean fighters has been accompanied by the terrible outrages of the Germans, and it has taken us all our time to keep down the pagan passion for reprisals, to “be angry and sin not.”

Still, however difficult it may be to account for the fact that the war has not poisoned our temper with hatred, we may humbly set that down to our credit; or, rather, we may thank God that he has enabled us to resist that particular temptation. I have known many cases of good people who have resented any omission on the part of their ministers to pray for our enemies, and one of the frequent petitions is that we may "remember always the good in others and the evil in ourselves." It is much to fulfil the duty of indignation and at the same time to remember what spirit we are of.

Finally, it is right to add that the war has had practically no hindering effect on our foreign missions. Here and there, as in Palestine and South Africa, the war operations have interfered temporarily with particular missions, and the abuse of their freedom by some German missionaries, who treacherously acted as spies and sedition-mongers, has led to their deportation from British territory. But the money for missions has flowed in unabated, in spite of the extra claims on the purse for war funds; in some cases the subscriptions have actually increased. And the interest is as keen as ever. The war, luckily, has not led to any suspension of activity in the mission field. We have not allowed ourselves to regard missions as of no military importance for Christianity.